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THE APOTHEOSIS

ANDREW O'CONNOR

THE WORK OF ANDREW O'CONNOR

BY ROYAL CORTISSOZ

IN any exhibition of sculpture the thing above all others for which one instinctively looks is good technique. Without it the most carefully pondered conceptions in bronze or marble are only pathetic monuments of misspent labor. Mediocrity sometimes puts on an amazingly specious air in painting and almost succeeds in evading detection. It cannot disguise itself in plastic art. There you must know your trade or perish. There technical proficiency is veritably as the breath of life. Yet there is no other art in which mere adroitness is so soon found out or so barren of charm and hence the searcher after technique in sculpture is also inevitably a searcher after charac-

ter, after the personal quality which forms, so to say, the very grain and texture of technique. That is the type that you find in Andrew O'Connor, one of the youngest and one of the most brilliant members of the American school.

The value of his work lies peculiarly in the fact that it always has something to say to us, is never an arid exercise in manual dexterity. One reason for this, if we may judge from the sculptures that he has shown to the public, must be ascribed to a kind of precocity. In his youth he made, I dare say, the usual uncertain experiments, but I have never seen, in his studio or out of it, anything of his that savored of immaturity. From



BAS-RELIEF, ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH

ANDREW O'CONNOR

the start he would seem to have possessed unusual skill and this, I think, has encouraged him to let himself go, using his brains as well as his fingers. Trained in Mr. French's studio he was bound to be subjected to a wise and fruitful discipline, but though that distinguished sculptor must have taught him much it seems to me probable that if he was the young man's instructor he was even more his guide. Once a young sculptor like O'Connor has been well grounded in the rudiments all he needs is to be set in the right path. He was fortunate in the opportunity which first brought him into notice, the decorative scheme worked out at St. Bartholomew's church in New York. Stanford White and Mr. French were the chief collaborators in this design, which was to make

an ecclesiastical portal in America comparable to some of those noble works in architecture and sculpture which enrich European cathedrals, and when Mr. O'Connor was called in to do his share he did it under the steadying influence of one large and majestic idea. How well he acquitted himself may be inferred from an anecdote. When Saint Gaudens saw O'Connor's work he hunted up his junior's name and address and straightway called upon him with words of the warmest appreciation.

These reliefs of his have a triple virtue. In the first place, they are part and parcel of the architecture with which they are associated. Secondly, they abound in fine and characterful modeling. Lastly, they are full of life and movement. This final merit is, perhaps,



BAS-RELIEF, THE CRUCIFIXION

ANDREW O'CONNOR

the one which makes the most immediate appeal. Even the casual passerby must be arrested by the scenes from the Old and New Testaments in which the sculptor has contrived to give all of his figures, human and celestial, ebullient individu-

triumph of pure sculpture. There is no formalism here and yet there is perfect harmony. There is vivid movement and yet there is no violation of convention. Here you see simply the natural sculptor using his mother tongue. Form is his



CARYATID

ANDREW O'CONNOR

ality. One pauses full of curiosity to pick out the meaning of this or that figure, just as one pauses to trace the symbolism carved by some Gothic craftsman centuries ago above the door of a French church. And yet, as I have already indicated, one comes back to the technique, the style, and rejoices in a

language and he expresses himself easily, spontaneously, and with a true sense of measure. His reliefs are, indeed, just variations on the beauty of form, designs in which bodies and limbs are exquisitely caressed and developed into a rich arrangement of line and contour, throughout which the play of light and shade



GENERAL LAWTON

ANDREW O'CONNOR

THE LAWTON MONUMENT, INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

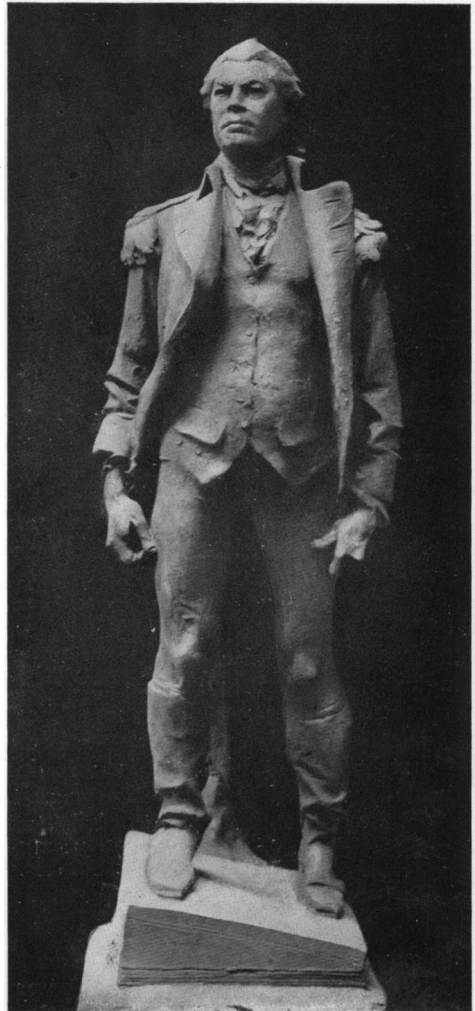
PHOTOGRAPH OF MODEL SHOWN IN PARIS SALON

gives the last touch of artistic magic. It is workmanlike to the last degree, consummately right, and it is, into the bargain, wonderfully original. One can imagine how Mr. White and Mr. French must have been delighted, recognizing in Mr. O'Connor a true constructive genius. He worked with them in complete understanding and at the same time gave to his reliefs his own stamp.

It is by his essentially creative power that one is most subtly attracted. Rarely does an artist emerge from his pupilage with so clearly defined a style and one so free from borrowed influences. There is nothing in his work to recall his master nor is there anything to suggest that he was affected by the example of Saint Gaudens. I have wondered sometimes what particularly he may have gathered from the experience which he had for a while in the studio of John Sargent. If that painter colored his ideas at all the fact is not clearly visible in any of his sculptures. Nor does Paris appear to have left any mark upon him. One might say that he was at least in sympathy with the art of Rodin, but he has unmistakably escaped the current temptation to adopt the mannerisms of the French sculptor. I well remember a talk with the late Paul Leroy, the veteran critic, at the time that O'Connor was showing his "General Lawton" at the Salon. He told me that the statue detached itself from its surroundings like the work of a genius midst a wilderness of commonplace things mechanically produced by journeymen. He spoke of the beautiful sincerity of the piece and especially of its original force, and not only from Leroy but from other sources I heard of the profound impression which O'Connor had made in a city where modern sculpture has had its culmination. Perhaps it is worth while to mention at this point, that in spite of his prodigious success in Paris, where he has labored now for some years, he has remained the same quiet and modest student that he was at the outset of his career. He is, by the same token, an artist with a conscience. I have known him to reject an important commission because the

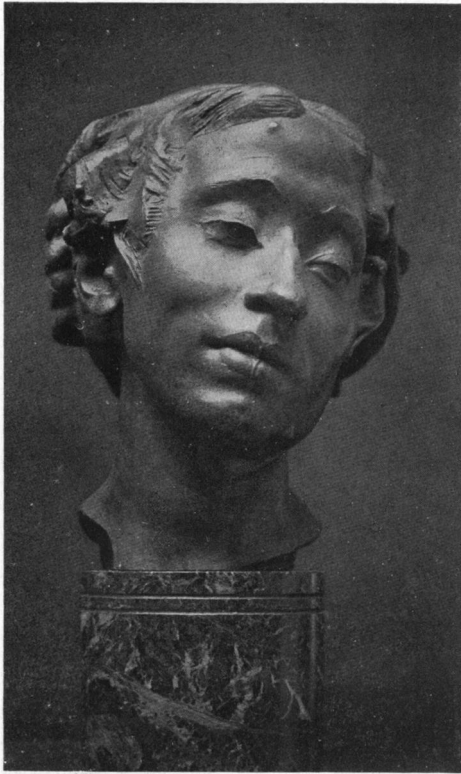
architect who sought his aid wanted him to adjust his style to that of a certain period; in short, to make his technique the vehicle for a kind of sublime hack work. O'Connor was not so modest that he could thus suppress himself.

To return to the "General Lawton," it is interesting to observe that Mr. O'Connor is very much the "all-round" sculptor, attacking with the same confidence problems of portraiture, imaginative sculpture, and decoration. Moreover, he can combine all these resources of his, as is shown by his model for the Barry Monument. It has seemed to me



COMMODORE JOHN BARRY

ANDREW O'CONNOR



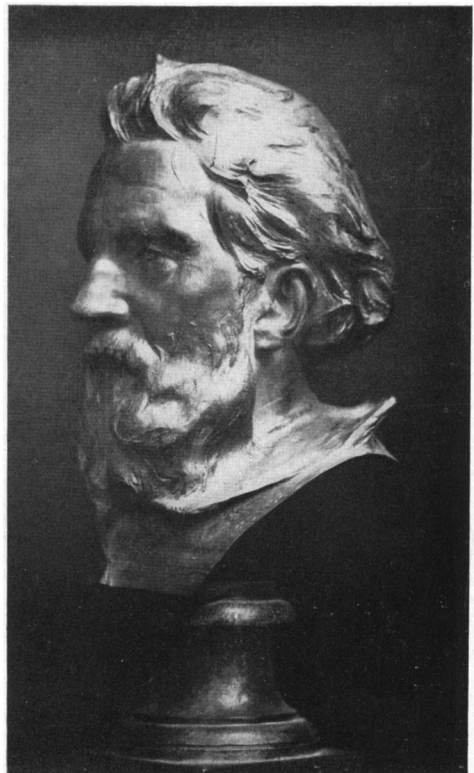
PORTRAIT

ANDREW O'CONNOR

a great pity to abandon that brilliant conception of his. The figure of Barry is kindred to that of the "General Lawton" in its virile simplicity, its unforced picturesqueness, and the rest of the monument, both in its architectural and sculptural aspects, has a very fresh and interesting character, besides being full of dignity. It would be a fine thing if this model might be reconsidered and ultimately selected for execution. Washington could have no more creditable embellishment amongst her works of art. It is, I may add, upon just such heroic undertakings that Mr. O'Connor is destined to wreak himself in the years to come, for he has the instincts of the true monumental sculptor and abilities like his are too exceptional to be neglected by the civic and other bodies that are responsible for large enterprises in plastic art. But it is to be hoped that he may be never so closely occupied upon designs of the sort as to neglect those

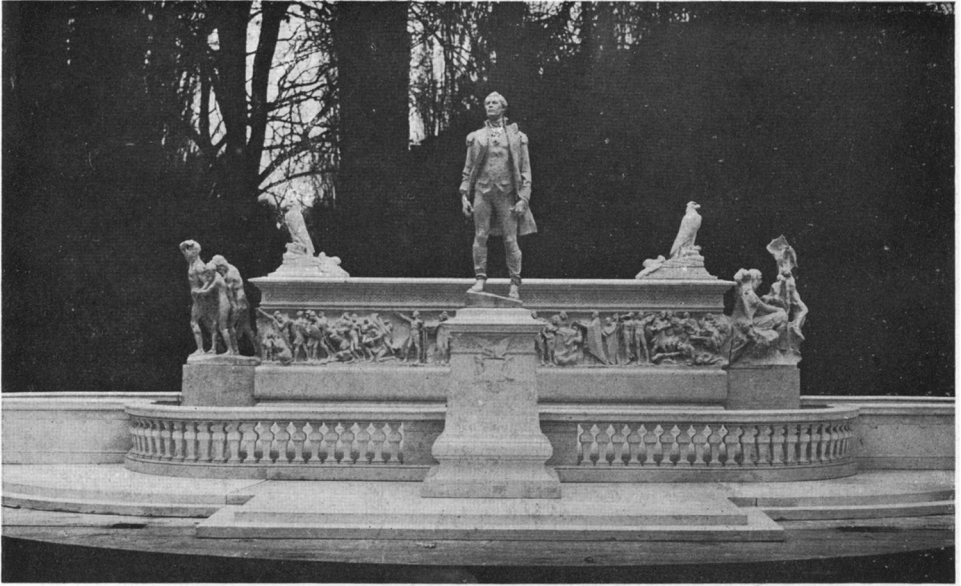
more intimate qualities which come out in a figure of his like the "Inspiration," in a group like the "Crucifixion," and in his portrait of the old painter R. L. Newman, and his several other busts. Especially do his studies of feminine types, through their delicacy and their poignant human interest, inspire the wish that he may always find plenty of time and energy for very personal sculptures on a small scale.

In them, as in some of the individual figures of his St. Bartholomew reliefs, you are aware of the sensitiveness that belongs to this exemplar of masculine power. He is not precisely a dreamer or a poet, illustrating romantic themes. The truth is that a note of sternness, or at least of a certain gravity, runs through nearly everything that he does. But just as he avoids the cloying grace which the cult of Rodin has made unduly popular, so he avoids the rude and even uncouth weightiness which



R. L. NEWMAN

ANDREW O'CONNOR



MODEL ENTERED IN COMPETITION FOR THE JOHN BARRY MEMORIAL

AWARDED FIRST PRIZE BY EXPERT JURY

has been mistaken for a nobler trait by the ill-advised imitators of Meunier. It is the golden mean that is his ideal. Following it he is not vaguely adventurous where subject is concerned, but neither is he afraid of the motive which demands imagination in the sculptor. His religious compositions offer splendid proof of his ability to move with sureness on a high plane and further evidence of his spiritual grasp may be discerned in the "Inspiration," or the helmeted figure modeled for the Liscum Monu-

ment. That he can be positively daring, too, is obvious from the cyclopean funerary monument, surmounted by a gigantic owl, which remains unexecuted, but ought some day to be set like a pharos on the borders of the Hudson or some other stately stream. One thinks of the future as well of the present in thinking of Andrew O'Connor. He is the kind of artist that grows. Considering what he has already done it is natural to look with eagerness and with confidence for the fruits of his coming years.

SEYMOUR HADEN'S ETCHINGS

AN EXHIBITION AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

BY HELEN WRIGHT

IN London, early in June, an eminent surgeon died—Sir Francis Seymour Haden—the memory of whom will abide, however, even more on account of his achievements in the field of art than in that of surgery. Mr. Frederick Wedmore has said that among modern etchers of landscape, among modern exponents in

the art of black and white, Seymour Haden stands easily first.

At the Library of Congress, in Washington, a memorial exhibition of Haden's etchings has been arranged under the auspices of the Division of Prints. This exhibition comprises nearly two hundred prints, the majority, if not all, of which